

## Cross-continent creations

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Pupils in an after-school art program at Floral Street School are doing some very long-distance collaboration. Each of 39 elementary school pupils is working on a painting or collage that was started at an elementary school in Japan, then mailed to Shrewsbury.

The paintings were simply backgrounds painted by first-graders, many times just a mix of similar tones. The after-school group at Floral Street, mostly fourth-graders led by art teacher Robert R.

Wilson, finished the pieces. Some used the background for an underwater or outdoor scene; others cut up the background and pasted it to something else as a new design with paint, glue, tissue paper or lots of glitter.

The children also created backgrounds to send to Japan, where fifth-graders finished the pieces and mailed them back for students to see. Several are on display at Floral Street.

Mr. Wilson calls it "reciprocating art."

"There's a lot of educational benefits to using art as a way to communicate ideas" and make friends, he said.

The Floral Street pupils will finish their pieces in a week, and they will be on display locally for a short time before making the trip to Japan.

The exchange with Japan is similar to Mr. Wilson's collaborative art projects in which dozens of people contribute a small mark or item to a larger piece. (An exhibit of the collaborative art was on display in the lobby of the University of Massachusetts Medical School last summer.)

The exchange came about through the connections and work of Tomomi Heinze, a parent volunteer from Shizuoka, Japan. The Shrewsbury pupils are working with pupils at the Fujimi Elementary School in Shizuoka, and Ms. Heinze has translated notes about the project between pupils.

Other potential collaborators include pupils in India; another parent volunteer, Nandini Alagappan, hails from there.

Mr. Wilson is a semifinalist in the state-run Teacher of the Year contest, according to Assistant Superintendent Judith Evans. "He's a very innovative guy," she said.

